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CHRISTIAN LIBERTY:

A SERMON,

ON THE HISTORY AND PRINCIPLES

OF THE

NONCONFORMISTS.

PREACHED AT A

MONTHLY MEETING OF THE INDEPENDENTS IN LONDON;

With Remarks on Mr. DAUBENY's Guide to the Church.

LEST YOUR MINDS BE CORRUPTED FROM THE SIMPLICITY THAT IS IN CHRIST. 2 COR. II. 3.

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TO THE REVEREND

THE MINISTERS

OF THE

INDEPENDENT DENOMINATION IN LONDON.

REV. SIRS,

THE following Diſcourſe, preached ſome years ago at one of your Monthly Aſſociations, would not now have made its appearance, had not another member of your body declined the publication of his, more recently delivered, on the ſame ſubject. It was at firſt tranſcribed merely with a view to its being inſerted in a periodical pamphlet, in which it ſeemed naturally to claim a place. It was accordingly received by the publiſher, and its intended inſertion announced. To the great ſurpriſe, though not equal regret of the author, he found at the end of the month that publication was diſcontinued *.

Upon

* *The Proteſtant Diſſenter's Magazine:* A work, the original plan of which ſeemed to promiſe acceptance and uſefulneſs; but which failed of permanent ſucceſs, partly from the ſudden death of the firſt Editor, who left few equals; and partly, it is apprehended, from an eſſential defect in the outſet—the want of care to engage a number of able hands to be reſponſible for the proper execution of their

Upon this he determined (with the approbation of ſome friends who had peruſed it) to ſend it forth by itſelf, in a cheap form, hoping that it might have in this way, at leaſt as general a circulation as it would have had in the former; which it doubtleſs will, if it ſhould be thought worthy of your patronage, to which the Author begs leave to recommend it; who is

Your brother and ſervant,
in the bonds of faith and love,

An Independent Miniſter.

Feb. 10. 1800.

their reſpective parts. In conſequence of this, it chiefly depended (like moſt other Magazines) upon occaſional contributions; which were ſoon found to be precarious and very unequal, both in point of compoſition and religious ſentiment; the indiſcriminate inſertion of which, inſtead of pleaſing any party, diſguſted all.

It may deſerve conſideration, whether a new Monthly Publication might not be ſet on foot by the regular Diſſenters, which would be likely to meet with better ſucceſs, and which might be uſeful in promoting the *Diſſenting Intereſt* in particular, as well as the cauſe of religion in general, eſpecially among the riſing generation; many of whom are loſt from among us for want of being well informed and eſtabliſhed in the principles which it is the deſign of this performance to enforce.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY:

A

SERMON.

GAL. V. 1.

Stand faſt therefore in the Liberty where-with Chriſt hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

THE yoke to which the Apoſtle here particularly refers, was that of circumciſion, and other Jewiſh ceremonies connected with it, in favour of which the Chriſtians, converted from Judaiſm, ſtill retained a ſtrong prejudice, and which they were zealous to impoſe upon the Gentile converts. Theſe Galatians had, in a very unworthy manner, ſubmitted to bear this yoke, to the diſhonour of Chriſt and the Goſpel. The apoſtle Paul faithfully reproves them for it, inſtructs them in the nature of chriſtian liberty, and exhorts them to be ſteady in the maintenance of it. He gives them to underſtand, that the ceremonial inſtitutions of

the Moſaic ritual, were aboliſhed by the goſpel, and that Chriſtians were free from all obligation to ſubmit to any of them. He tells them, that they were bound in duty to Chriſt their only Lord and Maſter, who had called them to this liberty, to oppoſe all encroachments upon it; to reject all ſuch impoſitions on conſcience, and zealouſly to aſſert and maintain their chriſtian rights and privileges.

Now the ſpirit of the Apoſtle's argument is, at leaſt, equally concluſive in favour of a vigorous oppoſition to all *other* attempts to enſlave the mind and burden the conſcience; and a zealous defence of chriſtian liberty in general, from whatever quarter it may be invaded. I may, therefore, with propriety, addreſs to you, my brethren, as *Proteſtant Nonconformiſts*, theſe words of Paul to the *Galatians*, referring to *Jewiſh* ceremonies, with reſpect to certain impoſitions practiſed in *our* day, *Stand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt has made you free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* In purſuance of my deſign in treating upon this paſſage, I ſhall,

I. Give you ſome account of that liberty into which Chriſt has introduced his diſciples.

II. Shew you how, and by whom, it has been invaded.

III. Repreſent the manner in which it has been defended, enlarged, and ſecured. And then, by way of improvement, I ſhall,

IV. Explain and inforce the Apoſtle's exhortation, to ſtand faſt in the liberty with which we are favoured, and to guard againſt

every thing whereby we may be brought under any antichriſtian yoke.

I pretend not, under either of theſe heads, to advance any thing which the generality of you do not already know, and ſome of my hearers, better than I can preſume to inform them; my only intention is, *to put you in remembrance of theſe things, though ye already know them, that ye may be eſtabliſhed in the preſent truth*; and to ſtir us all up to a practical and more zealous attention to them.

1. I would lay before you ſome account of that liberty with which Chriſt makes his diſciples free.

LIBERTY is one of the greateſt and beſt giſts of God to men. Much has been ſaid, and too much cannot be ſaid, in commendation of it. The patrons of it have been ranked among the illuſtrious of mankind, and they deſerve to be had in everlaſting remembrance.

But the moſt illuſtrious perſon that ever appeared in our world, to eſpouſe the liberties of human beings, was He, of whom my text ſpeaks, *Jeſus Chriſt the Son of the living God*. He ſaw mankind miſerably enſlaved, and he came from heaven to earth with the moſt benevolent diſintereſted deſign, of ſetting them free. For this end he aſſumed the nature of the miſerable captives, and took up his dwelling among them. For this end he preached and prayed, he laboured and travelled, with inceſſant induſtry. For this end he ſuffered a life of fatigue, and reproach, and pain. Yea, for this end he bled and died.

I ſhould not do juſtice to my preſent ſubject, nor to the character of our great deliverer, were I not to take notice

1. Of that *ſpiritual* liberty which he came to procure for the *ſouls* of men; though this is not what now principally calls for our attention. The Lord of glory ſaw mankind, as fallen creatures, faſt bound in the chains of *guilt*, priſoners of divine juſtice, obnoxious to the wrath of an offended ſovereign, groaning under the curſe of a broken law. And when there was no other eye to pity, no other arm to ſave, his eye had compaſſion, and *his arm brought ſalvation.* In order to procure liberty to captive ſinners, he chearfully gave up his own; ſubmitted to become the priſoner of the Jews and Romans; the priſoner of death. By his bitter ſufferings he paid the dreadful debt which they had contracted. He laid down his precious life as a ranſom for theirs, as the price of their redemption. Therefore, ſays the author of this Epiſtle, *Chriſt hath redeemed us from the curſe of the law, being made a curſe for us.* Nor was this all;

He ſaw mankind enſlaved in the chains of *vice*, groaning under the bondage of luſt and corruption; the miſerable captives of Satan and the world; and by his mediation he hath procured deliverance to his believing people from theſe cruel tyrants. *He gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.* By his death he hath conquered him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Triumphing over the powers of darkneſs, he

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made a ſhew of them openly. He gave himſelf for our ſins, that he might deliver us from *this preſent evil world.* By his word, and by his ſpirit, he introduces them that had lain in the moſt ignominious bondage *into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.* Therefore, ſays he, by the prophet Iſaiah, "The ſpirit of the Lord God is upon me, becauſe he hath anointed me —to proclaim *liberty* to the captives, and the opening of the priſon to them that are bound." This ſpiritual liberty is the moſt glorious and happy that a creature can enjoy. *If the Son make you thus free, then are ye free indeed.* But on this I muſt not now enlarge. I proceed to another kind of liberty, which, though inferior to this, is yet of high importance, which it becomes us to prize as the gift of our Redeemer, and to contend for even unto blood. And that is,

2. Liberty of *conſcience*, or freedom from the IMPOSITIONS OF MEN, in matters of religion. A liberty to think for ourſelves, and to worſhip God according to the dictates of our own underſtanding, without any other reſtraints than thoſe of the infallible oracles of God's word.

Liberty of conſcience, or an uncontrolled freedom of thought and of action in all religious concerns, is indeed every man's birthright. But it is confirmed to Chriſtians by a new and divine charter, procured for them by the Son of God. He hath aſſumed the character of our only *Lord* and *Maſter*; and he has a right to do ſo, not only as he has bought us

with his blood, and as *the Father hath given him to be Head over all things to the church*, but as he is in every view *qualified* to teach us What we are to believe, and how we are to worſhip God, and what are the terms of admiſſion into his church. He has accordingly claimed our ſole ſubjection, and expreſsly forbidden our being *the ſervants of men*, or implicitly ſubmitting our conſciences to any other guidance than his. *Call no man maſter*, ſays he, *upon earth, for one is your maſter even Chriſt.*

To aſſert and maintain this liberty, in oppoſition to the claims of human authority, whether that of POPES, PRIESTS, or PRINCES, is the duty of Chriſtians, is the profeſſion of Proteſtants, and the grand principle of Proteſtant Diſſenters. It might, indeed, appear aſtoniſhing, that any, under a chriſtian name, ſhould attempt to invade it, were it not for the conſideration of thoſe luſts and corrupt paſſions of men, which have diſcovered themſelves, among other inſtances, in the diſpoſition of mankind to tyrannize over one another. The fact, however incredible, is too notorious to be denied. We have ſeen a ſtriking inſtance of it in thoſe impoſitions of the Jewiſh converts on their Gentile brethren, to which the Apoſtle refers in the text. Let us then, in the next place,

II. Take a brief view of thoſe attacks which have been made on men's religious liberties, and the rights of conſcience.

Through that pride and ambition which are

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ſome of the worſt effects of the common apoſtacy, men have been impelled to reſtleſs endeavours to gain dominion over their fellow-men; and not content with holding their *perſons* in ſubjection, and depriving them of their property, or their *civil* liberties, they have very commonly claimed authority over their *conſciences*, and aſſumed a right to preſcribe to them in regard to their RELIGION: to dictate what they ſhall believe, and how they ſhall worſhip God; and to impoſe upon them various external rites and ceremonies, according to their own fancies, as neceſſary parts or appendages of that worſhip.

This domineering ſpirit has been exerciſed, and this abſurd uſurpation of the rights of conſcience has been practiſed, more or leſs, in all ages and nations. Not only did the governors in *idolatrous* countries aſſume authority over God's profeſſing people the *Jews*, when they ſojourned or were captives amongſt them, to forbid their praying to Jehovah, and to require them to bow down to their idols; but the chief prieſts and rulers among the *Jews* themſelves, diſcovered a diſpoſition to abuſe their truſt by *lording it over God's heritage*. In our Saviour's time, we find him complaining of the Scribes and Phariſees as ſtretching their prerogative, binding unneceſſary burthens upon the people, and *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*. This impoſing ſpirit remarkably diſcovered itſelf in the injunctions and prohibitions they laid upon Chriſt and his apoſtles, and the perſecutions they raiſed againſt them,

them, for not conforming to the religion of the ſtate, for refuſing to ſubmit to unauthorized ceremonies, and to receive human *traditions* as equally binding with divine inſtitutions; and for profeſſing and teaching doctrines which they ſtigmatized with the name of *hereſy*.

Nor did this ſpirit of uſurpation ceaſe, after chriſtianity, *that law of liberty*, came to be generally propagated and eſtabliſhed, even among thoſe who profeſſed to embrace it. What impoſitions the Jewiſh converts attempted to lay upon their brethren of Gentile origin, you have in part heard. And there are various other paſſages in the New Teſtament, as well as in this Epiſtle to the *Galatians*, in which the brethren of the circumciſion are reprimanded for attempting to *put a yoke upon the necks of the diſciples*.

But this impoſing ſpirit was by no means confined to the *Jewiſh* chriſtians; yet more unreaſonable attempts were afterwards made, for which there was not the like plauſible ground, by perſons of a different deſcription, to impoſe upon their fellow chriſtians things which were confeſſedly of mere human invention. The ſpirit of domination had indeed early diſcovered itſelf in the apoſtles of our Lord, who contended among themſelves *who ſhould be greateſt*. And though he ſeverely reproved them for it, expreſsly telling them, that *it ſhould not be ſo among them*, as it was among the *Gentiles*, who ſtrove to exerciſe *lordſhip* over one another, yet we find, in proceſs of time, that they who pretended to be

be their ſucceſſors, unduly magnified their office, and aſſumed a degree of authority over their brethren, in matters of faith and worſhip, utterly inconſiſtent with their characters as the ſervants of a crucified maſter, and *the ſervants of all men* for his ſake. When they were free from the perſecutions of the common enemy, they began to tyrannize over their own flocks. As their churches increaſed, and they grew proſperous in the world, they ſought to extend their power, and to enforce their injunctions by civil penalties. At length, by gaining the favour of the civil magiſtrate, and forming an unnatural "alliance between the church and the ſtate," they gratified their ambition to the full. The eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity by the ſecular power, which commenced in the reign of *Conſtantine*, proved the grand means of corrupting it. Prieſts and princes hence forward combined to exerciſe dominion over the conſciences of its profeſſors, to the ſubverſion of his authority, who is the only *king in Zion*; abridging or enlarging the original laws of Chriſt; ſubſtituting their own injunctions in the room of his, and enforcing obedience by civil rewards and puniſhments. As alſo in depriving congregations of the right of chuſing their own miniſters, and impoſing upon them ſuch as they could not hear with pleaſure or profit.

The Biſhop of Rome, originally the paſtor of a ſingle church or congregation, and upon an equality with other chriſtian paſtors or biſhops, gradually enlarged his dioceſe, and extended

tended his power, till at length, by the aſſiſtance of the imperial arm, he aſſumed the character of "univerſal biſhop, the vicar of Chriſt "upon earth, and the head of the church."

What powers his ſucceſſors the *Popes* have claimed and exerciſed all over Europe, and over the inhabitants of this country; what impoſitions they laid upon conſcience, and how grievouſly they violated both the civil and religious liberties of mankind, I need not ſay, nor will the time allow me to ſpecify.

When this kingdom (in whoſe hiſtory we are now principally concerned) ſhook off the papal yoke, the liberty of the goſpel was far from being reſtored; for the firſt of our ſovereigns who rejected the power of the Roman Pontiff, *Henry* VIII. inſtead of releaſing his ſubjects from human authority in matters of religion, made it his great object to ſecure his own; which in fact he ſubſtituted in the room of that which his holineſs had before exerciſed, declaring himſelf to be "the ſole head of the "church upon earth, in all his dominions." A character which the kings of England have claimed ever ſince; in virtue of which they have maintained a power "to exerciſe all "manner of eccleſiaſtical juriſdiction, to hear "and determine all manner of cauſes eccleſi-"aſtical, and to reform and correct all vice, "ſin, errors, and hereſies whatſoever." What miſchiefs and perſecutions have enſued in conſequence of the exerciſe of ſuch a prerogative, through various ſucceſſive reigns, the time would fail me to relate. I will only ſay, that

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it has, in various inſtances, ſubverted *that liberty wherewith Chriſt has made* his diſciples *free*, by prohibiting their worſhip of God, according to the dictates of their own minds, and requiring their conformity to modes and ceremonies which their conſciences diſapproved, under ſevere penalties, fines, impriſonment, and death. Let us now,

III. Attend to the ſeveral attempts which have been made, in different periods, for the *defence* of religious liberty, and the ſucceſs with which they have been crowned.—There have not been wanting thoſe in all ages who have oppoſed theſe encroachments on the rights of conſcience, and who have dared to aſſert their liberty. So did *Daniel*, and the three Hebrew youths, in *praying to their God*, notwithſtanding the royal prohibition, and in refuſing to *worſhip the image which Nebuchadnezzar ſet up*. So did the Apoſtles of our Lord, when refuſing ſubmiſſion to the Jewiſh Sanhedrim; they nobly replied to their accuſers, *We ought to obey God rather than man*. So did the Gentile converts, when the Jewiſh zealots were for impoſing their abrogated rites upon them, as is related *Acts* xv. where we find the apoſtles *Paul* and *Barnabas* eſpouſing their cauſe, and going to Jeruſalem to conſult their brethren aſſembled in council, who unanimouſly condemn the impoſing ſpirit of the Jews, as *ſubverting the ſouls of the diſciples*, and paſs a decree in favour of Gentile liberty. And in this Epiſtle to the *Galatians*, Paul mentions, with honour, thoſe

thoſe chriſtian brethren, glorying to include himſelf among them, who reſiſted the intolerant ſpirit of thoſe whom he calls *falſe brethren*; *who*, ſays he, *came in privily to ſpy out our liberty which we have in Chriſt Jeſus; to whom*, he adds, *we gave place by ſubjection, no, not for an hour.* The ſame noble ſpirit was diſcovered by many individuals, with reſpect to the *Romiſh* tyranny, during the thick darkneſs of Popiſh ignorance. Among the glorious aſſerters of chriſtian liberty, in oppoſition to the domination of *the man of ſin*, the WALDENSES and the ALBIGENSES, in *France*, in the 12th and 13th centuries, make a diſtinguiſhed figure; as alſo do JOHN WICKLIFFE, and his followers, in England, in the 14th century; who obtained from their enemies the contemptuous name of *Lollards*.

This courageous man attacked the ſcandalous irregularities of the monks, and various other eccleſiaſtical abuſes, not excepting thoſe of the Pope himſelf, both in preaching and writing. And that the people might ſee how groſsly they had been impoſed upon, and be rouſed to aſſert their liberties, he tranſlated the New Teſtament into Engliſh.

But the moſt effectual oppoſition to the tyranny of the Roman antichriſt, was begun in *Germany* in the 16th century, by MARTIN LUTHER, who was quickly joined by JOHN CALVIN, and various other faithful witneſſes, whoſe zeal kindled a light which not all the attempts of the ſons of ſuperſtition was able to extinguiſh. In conſequence of the ſpirited *proteſt*

teſt of ſeveral princes of the empire, and many imperial towns, againſt the decree of the Diet at *Spire*, 1529, the friends of the Reformation received the name of *Proteſtants*. From that period the cauſe of religious liberty gained much ground; and it quickly took root and flouriſhed in our own country. Many of the writings of the Reformers ſoon found their way into England, and made a number of converts among perſons of diſtinction in the church, who, both by their preaching and their publications, exerted themſelves in propagating the Proteſtant faith. But what moſt of all contributed to this great end was, the publication of the Holy Scriptures, in the Engliſh tongue; which, notwithſtanding former attempts, remained, with regard to the great majority, *a ſealed book*. By the light of the divine word now diffuſed, the errors of popery fled like the darkneſs on the riſing of the ſun.

Still, however, the laws of the land continued to bind the Romiſh *yoke* on the necks of Britons. The king himſelf, *Henry* VIII., was a bigoted Catholic, and he ſet himſelf to oppoſe the ſpread of Proteſtantiſm; with this view he wrote and printed a book in defence of popery, for which his holineſs conferred upon him the title of "Defender of the Faith."

But the providence of God (which often over-rules the luſts and paſſions of men for the accompliſhment of its own great deſigns) ſo ordered it, that a quarrel which *Henry* had

with the Pope, for refuſing to authorize the divorce of the queen, occaſioned the ſovereign to renounce the authority of the Roman pontiff, and free his ſubjects from their allegiance to him.

This was a promiſing ſtep towards the enlargement of Chriſtian liberty; and though the king himſelf continued a Roman Catholic, the authority of the Pope being thus ſhaken, an attachment to the doctrines of the Romiſh church gradually abated, through the zeal of Abp. *Cranmer* and other friends to Proteſtantiſm, who, in the next reign, that of *Edward* VI. made a conſiderable progreſs in the work of Reformation, particularly by purging the devotions of the church from the groſſeſt corruptions of popery, and tranſlating ſome of the beſt of the prayers into Engliſh, eſpecially by ordering the Engliſh Bible to be read in the churches: this was ſuch a ſtroke at the root of popery, as it could never recover.

And though, after the ſhort reign of this excellent young prince, the progreſs of the Reformation was impeded by the zeal of the bloody *Mary*, it became afterwards ſo much the more rapid. The cruelties of the popiſh biſhops contributed greatly to the injury of their cauſe; the aſhes of the martyrs proved the ſeed of the church; the blood which they ſhed for the ſake of a good conſcience, was ſo far from extinguiſhing the flame of liberty, that, like oil, it cauſed it to burn the brighter.

Through the favour of Providence this reign was as ſhort as it was cruel; and in the next, that

that of Queen *Elizabeth*, the attempts for a further Reformation were renewed. And though the good work did not go on in the national eſtabliſhment as its friends wiſhed and hoped, by reaſon of the partiality which this princeſs poſſeſſed for pomp and ceremony in religion, and her concern to ingratiate herſelf with the papiſts, yet the number of its advocates increaſed, and many of them were fully bent upon carrying the Reformation farther than their predeceſſors durſt attempt, or indeed ever thought of, though they never intended that it ſhould reſt where they left it.

In this reign, the Proteſtants were divided into two parties; the diſtinction between which is of importance to be attended to in the hiſtory of Nonconformity, as this diviſion was properly the origin of the Proteſtant diſſent; which, in fact, is nothing more than THE COMPLETION of the work which the REFORMERS began.

It muſt be obſerved here, that many Proteſtants had fled from the perſecution in *Mary*'s reign, to *Frankfort*, in *Germany*, where they found an aſylum. Being there free from reſtraint in the exerciſe of religion, many of them thought (very naturally and wiſely) that it became them to improve their liberty to the utmoſt, and to conduct their worſhip upon the Scripture plan, without the forms and ceremonies preſcribed at home. Others, however, were for adhering to the Service-book of K. *Edward*, thinking that it was a ſuffi-

cient improvement of the old popiſh worſhip.

When theſe exiles returned, on the acceſſion of *Elizabeth*, they came poſſeſſed of theſe different ideas, and diſpoſed to act according to them. Thoſe who wiſhed for a further reform, and attempted a greater purity in worſhip and diſcipline, obtained the name of PURITANS. Some of them complied with the preſent terms of conformity to the national church, in the hope of having their grievances removed. But many found themſelves bound in conſcience to *diſſent*, on account of ſome things in the Liturgy which they could not adopt, and eſpecially on account of the impoſition of certain popiſh habits and ceremonies.

Still, however, their objection was only to the *things* impoſed, not to the *power* itſelf which impoſed them. They had no diſlike to a national eſtabliſhment, nor did they ſcruple the uſe of a Liturgy. They, for the moſt part, attended the ſervice of the church, and only wiſhed for ſome alterations in it, and in the declarations to be made as terms of conformity, or ſome liberty to be allowed in the omiſſion of ſuch parts of the prayers, or the diſuſe of ſuch ceremonies and habits, as were offenſive to them. But ſuch was the arbitrary ſpirit of her majeſty, and ſuch the impoſing temper of the biſhops, that no liberty of this kind was allowed, nor was any indulgence granted, even in regard to things confeſſedly *indifferent*.

Many

Many of these *Puritans* (as they were contemptuously called) frequently held private meetings for divine worship, according to their own views; and such was the seriousness of their spirit, such their affectionate and edifying manner of praying and preaching, such the holiness of their lives, and their zeal in doing good to the souls of men, that they met with great countenance, not only from multitudes of the common people, but from persons of the first distinction.

At length, discouraged from all hope of such alterations in the church established as would enable them conscientiously to conform, some leading persons among them, in the year 1572, began the protestant dissent by founding a Presbyterian church at *Wandsworth*, in *Surry*.

In consequence of that freedom of thought which prevailed among the *Puritans*, who made the Scriptures the rule of their judgment, some of them, by degrees, formed more enlarged sentiments on Christian liberty, and thought that all ecclesiastical power, supported by civil authority, was an usurpation on the rights of Christians: "that a church of Christ "is a voluntary society, consisting of a single "congregation, which has a right within itself not only to elect its own pastors, but to "regulate all its concerns according to the "judgment and conscience of its members, "without being accountable to any power but "that of Jesus Christ; the province of the "civil magistrate being confined to CIVIL "affairs."

These opinions (first publicly maintained by *Robert Browne*) were afterwards adopted, in substance, by a large body of Nonconformists, called *Congregationalists* and *Independents*; and we have lived to see them embraced by the generality of Protestant Dissenters.

The Puritans of all descriptions, by their opposition to the hierarchy, were very obnoxious to government, and exposed to dreadful hardships. During the reigns of *James* I. and *Charles* I. the attempts of those among them who were friends to national establishments (as was the case with the *Presbyterians*) laboured in vain to get the terms of conformity made easier, or to obtain liberty to worship God in the manner they thought most agreeable to his word. Being continually oppressed with heavy fines and cruel imprisonments, many of them, to enjoy their christian liberties, fled to *Holland*, and others to the wilds of *America*, where they sowed the good seed which has since sprung up and increased an hundred fold.

Those that remained at home, had, upon the death of *Charles*, the prospect of having their wishes fully gratified under the *Commonwealth*, which overturned the constitution of the church of England, removed the bishops, put down the Common Prayer, and established the *Presbyterian* worship and discipline. Though most of these ministers were friends to monarchy, condemned the murder of the king, and disapproved the advancement of *Cromwell* as an usurpation, the generality

of the *Presbyterians*, and some of the *Independents*, embraced the opportunity of entering into the established church; in which they approved themselves some of the best parish ministers of which that church could ever boast: many of them were men of learning, and had been educated in the universities; some of them had received episcopal ordination, and most of them were plain, serious, and useful preachers.

But their liberty and prosperity were of short continuance, and some amongst themselves were instrumental to their overthrow. Upon the death of *Oliver*, and the resignation of his son, they were among the most active and zealous to restore the exiled monarch *Charles* II. from whom they had encouraged the hope, and obtained the promise, of favour and support. But they soon found reason to repent of their zeal and credulity: when he felt himself seated on the throne, though he professed so much regard as to appoint some of the *Presbyterian* divines his chaplains, he quickly discarded them, reinstated the sequestered clergy, restored the liturgy and the ceremonies, enjoined strict conformity, and suffered severe prosecutions to take place against those that refused it. He indeed, at one time, published a declaration in favour of such as had scruples about conformity, and for a while amused them with the hope of a *Comprehension* between them and the *Episcopalians* (which, with the Presbyterians, was a favourite object). Yet, after many conferences between the leading

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ing men on both ſides, they found themſelves deceived; as the object with the biſhops ſeemed to be, not ſo much to remove the impediments to their conformity to the church, as the better to aſcertain what would effectually drive them out of it; for they wanted no ſuch men among them.

At length an act was paſſed in the year 1662, called *The Act of Uniformity*, which required all that had livings in the eſtabliſhment to ſubſcribe the *Thirty-nine Articles*, and declare their "aſſent and conſent to all "and every thing," in a new edition of the *Common Prayer Book*, by the 24th of *Auguſt*, when many of them could have no opportunity of ſeeing it. This act effectually cleared the church of moſt of thoſe miniſters who were thought to have no right to be in it, and who indeed, if they had been conſiſtent, never would have been.

This was the grand æra of *Proteſtant Nonconformity*. On this trying occaſion, theſe obnoxious men acted a part which was ſufficient to convince the world of their integrity, and which has done them immortal honour. They were not properly "ejected," though that term has been uſually applied to them. The intention of government doubtleſs was to remove them, by requiring terms with which it was ſuppoſed they were too conſcientious to comply; had they been otherwiſe, they might almoſt to a man have continued in their livings. But rather than ſacrifice truth and a good conſcience to their worldly intereſt, they determined,

determined, to the number of above two thouſand, to give up their emoluments, and caſt themſelves upon Providence; moſt of them having no probable means of ſubſiſtence but the benevolence of their friends.

This event has commonly been lamented as an unhappy one. I cannot but view it in a contrary light, as having laid a foundation for ſuch a religious community as has been the means of ſupporting the intereſt of pure chriſtianity to much greater advantage than it would otherwiſe have been ſupported, and has moſt effectually contributed to thoſe enlarged ideas of *liberty* *, civil and religious, which are conducive to the happineſs of mankind, highly honourable to the Goſpel, and eſſential to the maintenance of the proper authority of the glorious Head of the Chriſtian church.

From a regard to theſe grand objects, the preſent DISSENT from the national eſtabliſhment is continued. Our reaſons for maintaining the ſeparation, are the ſame with thoſe for which our forefathers began it; for the terms of admiſſion into the church, required by the act of uniformity, remain unaltered to this day; and we cannot comply with them without renouncing *the liberty with which Chriſt has made us free.* I muſt add,

* The DISSENTERS have ever been conſidered as ſome of the beſt friends to the civil government of this country, as adminiſtered according to the principles of the REVOLUTION; which accounts for the abuſe which has always been caſt upon them by perſons ill affected to the cauſe of liberty, and the true ſpirit of the Engliſh conſtitution. See the ſpeeches of the biſhops in Dr. *Sacheverel's* Trial.

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In conſequence of the enlarged ideas of Chriſtian liberty, and the religious rights of men, ſince the days of the original Nonconformiſts, we have ſtronger reaſons againſt conformity than our fathers had.—We do not object merely to various particulars in the national church, but to the *authority that enjoins them*; a ſubmiſſion to which we conſider as a tacit denial of the authority of Chriſt as the only head of his church.—We object not merely to ſome things in the *Articles* required to be ſubſcribed, but to the right aſſumed by the magiſtrate to require *any* ſubſcription at all.—We object not merely to the ceremony of the *croſs* in baptiſm, or of *kneeling* at the Lord's ſupper, or to the uſe of particular *habits* (as if we thought one poſture of body, or one ſhape or colour of a garment, were ſinful more than another), but to the power aſſumed of impoſing any of theſe things as terms of communion.—We object not merely to ſome exceptionable paſſages in the Service Book, but to the authority which preſcribes to the miniſters of religion what prayers they ſhall offer to their Maker.—We object not only to *dioceſan biſhops*, and other eccleſiaſtical officers, whom Chriſt never appointed, but to the impoſition of any miniſters on the people to the excluſion of their own choice, as one of the groſſeſt violations of Chriſtian liberty.—We would willingly *render to Cæſar the things which are Cæſars*, but *the things which are God*'s we can *render to God alone*.

Happy for us, my brethren, that we live in times which permit us to act on these principles without fear or restraint. If your time allowed, I would remind you what unjust and cruel restraints were laid upon our forefathers, after their separation from the establishment—the integrity and zeal with which they persevered in maintaining their principles—the fortitude with which they suffered for them—as likewise, the kind appearance of providence for the enlargement of their liberty, particularly at the glorious REVOLUTION by King WILLIAM, and by the *Act of Toleration* passed in his reign; as also for the security of it on the accession of the house of *Hanover*, and the extension of it in the present reign; but the limits of a single discourse oblige me to desist.—Let our hearts overflow with gratitude for our distinguished privileges, and let us manifest a due concern to improve them, that they may not aggravate our guilt and condemnation.—This leads me to what I proposed, as the proper improvement of the subject,

IV. To urge upon you a diligent attention to the Apostle's exhortation in the text, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* And here permit me,

1. To recommend a steady adherence to your principles, in maintaining your DISSENT.

You would reject, with abhorrence, the thought

thought of ſubmitting again to the *Roman yoke*, and returning to the bondage of POPERY. Guard againſt every ſtep which leads that way: ſuch an one would be a conformity to the national church. Though ſhe proteſts againſt the errors of the church of Rome, and has, undoubtedly, diſcarded the groſſeſt of them, ſhe retains ſome portion of the *old leaven*. Not to mention the ceremonies ſhe ſtill enjoins, which are the relics of popiſh ſuperſtition, ſome parts of her ſervice are very imperfectly reformed. The *form of baptiſm* preſcribed in the church of England, countenances the notion of its being a regenerating ordinance, and eſſential to ſalvation. The *form of confirmation* is grounded on the ſame ſentiment, and ſuppoſes a ſpiritual power in the biſhop, the belief of which is as dangerous as it is unſcriptural. And the form of *abſolution*, in the viſitation of the ſick, directly avows the abſurd and blaſphemous tenet of popery, that it is in the power of the prieſt to forgive ſin *.

Moreover, the grand *foundation* of the Engliſh church is the ſame with that of *Rome*, namely, *human authority*. It is built on acts of parliament, without which no alteration can be made in a ſingle word of any of its forms; and it expreſsly claims, in one of the Articles,

* "Our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath left *power to his church* to abſolve all ſinners, who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences; and by his authority *committed to me*, I ABSOLVE THEE *from all thy ſins*, in the name of, &c."

dominion

dominion over men's faith. The words of it are, "The church hath power to decree rites "and ceremonies, and hath *authority* in con- "troverſies of faith." Art. xx.

To conform, therefore, to a church which makes ſuch claims as theſe, is thus far to go back towards the church of Rome: it is to give up your chriſtian liberty, and return to *the weak and beggarly elements* from which you had happily eſcaped, and to be entangled again in the old *yoke of* popiſh *bondage*. Be ſteadfaſt then in maintaining your diſſent. Stand faſt in the principles of Nonconformity, as the only conſiſtent principles of *Proteſtant Liberty*, to which the church of *England* herſelf is obliged to have recourſe, in defending her own diſſent from the church of *Rome*.

Submit to no authority in religion but his, who is the only Head of the church. Conform to nothing but what you perceive to have his warrant. Never yield up to *lay-patrons*, or others, the power of chuſing your ſpiritual guides; and in no inſtance even appear to ſacrifice your principles and your chriſtian liberty, for the ſake of emolument, or on any other conſideration; much leſs by proſtituting the *Lord ſupper* as a qualification for a civil office.

God forbid that I ſhould encourage a ſpirit of bigotry or uncharitableneſs towards thoſe that differ from us. I doubt not many are conſcientious in their conformity; and thoſe who are ſo, and who maintain a truly chriſtian deportment, I wiſh you to venerate and love. Though they *ſacrifice ſtill in the High places*,

yet it is *unto the* LORD *their God only*. Make all poſſible allowance for the prejudices of education, and for every circumſtance which may inſenſibly bias the minds of upright men. Treat them as brethren in Chriſt. But this may be done very conſiſtently with maintaining your diſſent in the fulleſt degree. Beware leſt candour degenerate into lukewarmneſs; and take heed leſt by an occaſional conformity, you or your families become wholly ſwallowed up in the national church, and by that means in the world.

I will not ſay, nor do I mean to inſinuate, that it is unlawful for a Proteſtant diſſenter to enter into an epiſcopal place of worſhip; eſpecially when at a diſtance from his own, or at times when there is no ſervice there: on the contrary, I would recommend it to Chriſtians in general to ſhew their catholiciſm towards good men of all denominations, as far as is conſiſtent with their own principles. But for Diſſenters to deſert their own proper paſtors, who have devoted their lives and ſacrificed their worldly intereſts to the cauſe of chriſtian liberty and ſcriptural chriſtianity, for the ſake of attending any of the eſtabliſhed clergy, however worthy as men, or excellent as miniſters, and apparently to adopt ſuch ceremonies, and join in ſuch parts of worſhip as they cannot but deem unſcriptural, is to contribute their part towards ſubverting the cauſe of chriſtian liberty, and genuine proteſtantiſm.

It is not a ſufficient juſtification of ſuch conduct to ſay, that "moſt of the prayers are "good, and the ſermons you hear are evan-

" gelical, popular, and useful." The same argument would, in some cases, equally vindicate frequenting a Roman-catholic chapel. Remember, the honour of Christ requires not only a regard to the *doctrines* he has taught, but to the *ordinances* he has appointed, and the *terms* of *communion* he has prescribed. Consider likewise that Christians ought not only to consult their own edification as individuals, but the interest of pure religion in their *families* and in the world, and the prosperity of the *churches* to which they belong, which is materially injured by such irregularity in the members of them.

2. Maintain the grand principles of christian liberty, and ever act upon them, in what concerns the members, and all the affairs of your own societies.

The Dissenters have been charged with inconsistency in this respect; I wish I could say, without a just foundation. *Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the thing that he alloweth*, or protests against. The warmest advocates for freedom have, in some instances, the most grosly violated it. Let us not even wish, by any kind of force, to restrain those who judge differently from ourselves, in regard to the subjects of this discourse, much less countenance any attempts (if such should ever be made) to overturn by violence the ecclesiastical establishment from which we dissent. Nor let us ever, *in practice*, adopt the principles which we profess to condemn, as maintained in it.

If we diſcover a perſecuting or intolerant ſpirit, if we call in the power of the civil magiſtrate to ſuppreſs error, or defend the truth; or if we attempt to do either by any other than *rational* and *ſcriptural arguments*, we are condemned out of our own mouths. If we ſet up tribunals among ourſelves, and rack the conſciences of our brethren; if we make Creeds of our own, or adopt thoſe already made, as ſtandards of truth, inſtead of the *ſacred oracles*, in our churches or in our ſeminaries;—if we appoint unſcriptural terms of communion in our ſocieties, or ſuffer any, either miniſters or members, like *Diotrephes, to have the pre-eminence*, and domineer over their brethren, we undermine the grand principles on which our diſſent is founded, and in fact vindicate the uſurpations of the church from which we ſeparate. Let us be zealous in ſuppreſſing error, and propagating truth; but never have recourſe to *carnal weapons*. Let us diſcard all but *the* SWORD *of the* SPIRIT, *which is the* WORD *of* GOD. Once more,

3. While with becoming zeal you maintain the cauſe of liberty in matters of faith, worſhip, and diſcipline, ſee to it that you be equally zealous in guarding againſt the bondage of *moral* ſlavery and corruption.

The moſt glorious part of that liberty with which Chriſt makes his people free, conſiſts in a deliverance from the *power of ſin*. The man that is under the government of his paſſions; of pride or anger, of luſt or envy, of malice or covetouſneſs, of whatever other free-

dom

dom he may boaſt, is in a ſtate of abject ſlavery, and is a ſtranger to the liberty of the Goſpel. Let us then look well to the ſtate of our own ſouls. While we are zealous againſt the impoſitions of *men*, let us beware of the *ſnare of the devil*, the tyranny of the world, and the domination of our own hearts luſts. Let us dread the thought of coming under the deſcription of thoſe (2 *Pet.* ii. 19.) who, *while they promiſe others liberty, are themſelves the ſervants*, the ſlaves, *of corruption: for of whom* (or of what) *a man is overcome, of the ſame is he brought into bondage.*

In the defence of our religious liberties, let us guard againſt thoſe evil paſſions which tend to hurt the cauſe, and will be ſure to hurt ourſelves. Hear, to this purpoſe, the words of the Apoſtle, (*Gal.* v. 13.) *For ye, brethren, have been called unto* LIBERTY; *only uſe not your liberty for an occaſion of the fleſh, but by love ſerve one another.* See alſo 1 *Pet.* ii. 16. *As* FREE, *and not uſing your* LIBERTY *as a cloke of maliciouſneſs; but as the ſervants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

Let us, by our temper and conduct, make it appear, that the cauſe of NONCONFORMITY is a cauſe *according to godlineſs.* Let not our zeal be wholly ſpent about matters of controverſy, but chiefly employed about the great intereſts of practical religion; vital chriſtianity. While we refuſe conformity to a National Church, let us ſee to it that we *be not conformed*

conformed to the WORLD. While we profeſs to honour Chriſt as the only Head of the church, let us honour him as the ſovereign of our hearts. While we adopt a mode of worſhip moſt agreeable to the ſimplicity of the Goſpel, let us worſhip God *in ſpirit and in truth*. While we reject Forms of prayer impoſed by others, let us not be *formal* in our own. While we glory in having our churches conſtituted on the Goſpel-plan, *let our converſation be as becometh the Goſpel*. And if we wiſh to make converts to our diſtinguiſhing mode of religion, let it be our firſt and chief concern to make them real converts to CHRIST.

The Puritans and original Nonconformiſts, were men of eminent piety, purity, ſpirituality, and heavenly mindedneſs. Let us ſtudy to reſemble them more in theſe particulars. Thus ſhall we beſt juſtify ourſelves to the world, and thus ſhall we moſt effectually maintain and advance the cauſe of Proteſtant Nonconformity.

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POSTSCRIPT.

POSTSCRIPT.

BY this publication the Author will probably incur, from ſome readers, the charge of promoting bigotry. But is it bigotry for any one to defend what he believes, on inquiry, to be true and important, while he exerciſes candour towards thoſe who differ? Not to do it, when called upon, would be lukewarmneſs. Many pieces have of late appeared againſt the Diſſenters; why ſhould they not ſtand forth in their own defence? On one of theſe pieces I would here make a few brief remarks, viz. *A Guide to the Church; by the Rev.* C. Daubeny.—The author brings many texts to prove *that the church which Chriſt erected is but* ONE, and *that to ſeparate from it is a* ſchiſm, *ſeverely condemned.* This is readily granted; but then, by this *one church* is meant, that body which comprehends *all Chriſtians* through the world. Now Mr. D. ought to have proved (what he takes for granted) that the *church of* England is this one body. But will he ſeriouſly affirm this? He has indeed denied it; for in defending her diſſent from the church of *Rome*, he ſays, p. 148. "The church of *Rome* and *Conſtantinople* were two *ſeparate branches* of the church of Chriſt, to their exiſtence as ſuch, their communion with each other was not eſſential. The church of England is alſo *a ſeparate branch* of the church of Chriſt; its ſeparation, therefore, from the church of *Rome*, cannot affect its exiſtence as a church of Chriſt, becauſe it poſſeſſes all the characteriſtic marks of a true church, &c. which it poſſeſſed *before its connection took place.* [Q. When was that?] The *proteſtantiſm*, therefore, of the church of England, conſiſts in *the right which one* INDEPENDENT *branch of the church of Chriſt claims of proteſting againſt another branch of it.*" This remarkable paſſage overturns the whole of Mr. C.'s reaſoning to prove the Proteſtant Diſſenters *ſchiſmatics.* We allow the church of England to be *one branch* of the church of Chriſt (though an unſound one). We claim for *our* churches (on his own principles, and his own *Articles* *) to be *other* branches of it. And thus there is an end of the controverſy.

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* See *Art.* xix. where a church is defined, *A Congregation of faithful men*, &c.

THE END.

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